







One cold market morning, I looked into a milliner's shop, and there I saw a pale, heavy, well-browned young fellow from the country, with his long east whip, and a lion's mane, holding up some little hats, and a small child holding on to his great coat. And what do you suppose was in "A boy's heart"? A little soft, blue, satin hood, with a swan-down border, white as the new-fallen snow, with a frill of rich blue around the edge.

By his side stood a very pretty woman, holding with no small pride the baby for whom it was the boy. And the one looked at each other in every glance, and the boy looked at each other in every little hood, and then at the large blue unconscious eyes, and fat dimpled cheeks of the little one. It was evident that neither of them had ever seen a *little baby like that before*.

"But really, Mary," said the young man, "it isn't three dollars very high.

Mary very prudently said nothing, but taking the little child in to the little hood, and held up the boy. The man looked at him, and without another word, down went the three dollars—all that the last week's baby came to; and as they walked out of that shop, it is hard to say which looked the most delighted with the bargain.

"Ah! thought I, "a little child shall lead them!"

Another day, as I was passing a carriage factory along one of our back streets, I saw a young woman at work on a wheel. The rough body of a carriage stood beside him, and there, wrapped up snugly, all hooded and closed, sat a little dark-eyed girl, about a year old, playing with a great shaggy dog. As I stopped, the man looked up from his work and turned admiringly towards his little companion, as much as to say, "See what I have for her!"

"Yes," thought I, "if the little lady ever gets a plume from admiring swains as sincere as that, she will be lucky."

Ah, these children! little witches! pretty, even in all their faults and absurdities! winning, even in their sins and iniquities! See, for example, yonder little fellow in a naughty fit—he has shaken his long curly hair over his blue eyes, fair brown hair bent in a front, and he leads his poor mother in infinite defiance—and the white shoulder shrugs naughtily forward. Can any but a child look so pretty even in their sins?

Then comes the instant change—flashing smiles and tears, as the good comes back all in a rush, and you are overwhelmed with protestations, promises and kisses! They are irresistible, too, these little ones! They pull you to pieces, make you sit up in the papers—make somersets on his books, and what can he do? They tear up newspapers—litter the carpets—pull, pup, and upset, and then jabber unmanageable English in self-defense, and what can you do for yourself? "If I had a child," says the precise man, "you should see!"

He does have a child, and his child tears up the papers, pulls up the carpet, and pulls his nose, like all other children, and what has the precise man to say for himself? Nothing—he strikes every body else—"a little child shall lead him!"

Poor little children! they bring and teach us, human beings, more good than they get in return! How often does the infant, with its soft cheek and helpless hand, awaken a man's heart to the joys of life, and the whole world of ease and higher feeling! How often does the mother repay this, by doing her best to wipe off, even before the time, the dew and fresh simplicity of childhood, and make her daughter too soon a woman of the world, as she has been.

The hardened heart of the worldly man is unlocked by the guileless tones and simple earnestness of his young friend; repays it, in turn, by leading to his boy all the crooked tricks, and hard ways, and callous maxims which have undone himself.

Go to the jail—to the penitentiary, and find there the wretch most sullen, brutal and hardened. Then look at your infant son—such as he is to you, such as some mother was this man. That hard hand was soft and delicate; that rough voice was tender and ringing; that bold, unfeeling heart was full of maternal love; that same heart, when he had been rocked and cradled as something holy. There was a time when his heart, soft and untroubled, might have opened to questioning of God, and Jesus, and been sealed with the seal of Heaven. But harsh hands seized it—screws, grim lines were impressed upon it—and all is over with him forever!

So, of the tender, weeping child is made the coarse, hardened—of the all-belonging child, the sneering skeptic of the beautiful and modest, the shameless and abandoned—and this is what the world does for the little one.

There was a time, when the *Divine One* stood on earth, and little children sought to draw near to him. But harsh human beings stood between him and them, forbidding their approach. Ah! had it not been always so? No, but when the world is full of cold, hard, unfeeling feelings—when the higher mysteries of his kingdom, he took a little child and set him in the midst, as a sign of him who should be greatest in heaven.

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